

Review on Yearbook of Chinese Theology 2015

G. Wright Doyle

(Global China Center, Charlottesville, Virginia, USA)

Mail Address:

G. Wright Doyle,

322 Lori Circle, Bastrop, TX 78602, USA, Email: wrightdoyle@gmail.com

Yearbook of Chinese Theology 2015. Paulos Huang, editor. Leiden: Brill, 2015. 250 pages include index.

At the outset of this inaugural volume, the nature and aims of the *Yearbook of Chinese Theology* are succinctly stated by editor Paulos Huang. Since evaluation of its contents must be based on its self-description, these words deserve quotation:

The *Yearbook of Chinese Theology* is “designed to meet the growing demand for the studies of Christianity as an academic discipline in the Chinese context in the area of Biblical Studies, Church History, Systematic Theology, Practical Theology, and Comparative Religions. The *Yearbook* also features articles exploring wider issues in church and society. The main focus of the *Yearbook* is on the interdisciplinary, contextual, and cross-cultural studies of the above five disciplines.” VIII

As Huang explains, “‘theology’ is understood in the broadest sense to refer to the study of Christianity, including various spiritual and meaning-making systems of belief and practice.” “Chinese” refers to “societies of mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macau, as well as the Chinese diaspora communities throughout the world.” VIII

Finally, the *Yearbook* emphasizes “studies on theology and Chinese Christianity by Chinese scholars, as well as studies on Chinese Christianity by non-Chinese theologians.” VIII

Paulos Huang possesses the requisite qualifications for editing this ambitious project. Born and brought up in China, he serves on the faculty of the School of Philosophy, Beijing Normal University, as well as the Department of Religious Study, University of Helsinki, Finland. In addition to being an accomplished Lutheran theologian and editor of a forthcoming series of translations of Luther’s works, Huang is founder and Editor-in-Chief of the *International Journal of Sino-Western Studies*, published by the Nordic Forum of Sino-Western Studies in Helsinki. Huang’s book, *Confronting Confucian Understandings of the Christian Doctrine of Salvation*, shows him also to be thoroughly grounded in Confucian studies.

A distinguished team of international scholars form the editorial board for the *Yearbook*, and articles come from outstanding writers and thinkers from a variety of fields.

Contents of this volume

Part 1 Systematic Theology and Chinese Humanities

Chapter 1, by Xiping Zhuo, examines a topic of great importance to Chinese society, “Chinese Religions and Harmonious World.”

Zhuo believes that China’s long experience of religious pluralism and harmony positions it to play a leading role in promoting inter-religious dialogue that will help prevent conflicts based on cultural ignorance and misunderstanding. A new Chinese theology, which is characterized by “the Middle Way, Harmony, Consensus, Reconciliation, Contextualization, and Community Consciousness,” will help set the tone.

Chapter 2, “Three-fold Thinking on the Sinicization of Christianity,” by Zhigang Zhang, presents the official government view that Christianity has grown in China because of the activity of hostile foreign forces, and urges Chinese Christians to “place the overall interest of our nation first, . . . and to make positive and important contributions to the development and progress of Chinese society today.” 23

Part 2 Practical Theology in Chinese Context

Chapter 3 Reverence for Life and Living with Reverence in the 21st Century: Meditations by a Ruified Christian.

Lauren F. Pfister, who teaches at Hong Kong Baptist University, is known for his large biography of James Legge and for his profound knowledge of Confucianism, which he prefers to call “Ruism.” His long, scholarly chapter is an attempt to respond to the environmental crisis from a “Ruist Christian” perspective.

Like many others, he believes that “the historical moment and the continuing problems of environmental degradation are so vast, particularly in mainland China, that only a more vigorous effort by both the government and an emerging form of civil society may be able to avert what is already a terrible decline in the quality of life of millions of Chinese.” 30 Nevertheless, though Christian and even secular reflections upon the crisis have been articulate and influential, Ruist teachings are far less so.

Reverence of life would include “strong feelings that move one to appreciate what is observed or otherwise considered with an inspired awe.” 35 The author employs the concept of “dialectics of harmonization” in a search for ways in which Ruism might see and respond to the environmental crisis. Along the way, he describes some “major polar structures found in Chinese cultural philosophy which pertain to ethical and sociopolitical areas of human experience,” which I found extremely helpful. 41-42 He adds to and modifies these to construct a Ruist approach that takes into account modern technology, which introduces new polarities into the world, creating both new problems and possible solutions.

Pfister argues that Ruist thought allows for, and must include, a concern for all persons, and even for the environment, rather than simply a focus on the family. Further, we must overcome the dichotomy between humans and technology, take responsibility for what we have done to the environment, and change our individual lifestyles.

Chapter 4 The Dimension of the Human-God Relation in the Thought-Picture of Chinese Contemporary Art, by Changping Zha.

The author believes that individuals cannot live without faith in the transcendent and that pre-occupation with this world only will inevitably distort human relationships, putting power in the driver’s seat and causing conflict. In recent years, Chinese art has tried hard to fight the cynicism emerging from years of dedication to atheistic materialism and its consequent hedonism. Humans begin to act like animals, leading to boredom and rage.

Some artists have moved from seeing God and humans in opposition to each other to a vision of God and humanity standing side by side, with the transcendent God becoming human in Jesus Christ and bridging the gap between our finitude and his infinity. Though they cannot represent the doctrine of the Trinity visually, they have attempted to express God’s immanence in Christ, and our communion with God through Christ, in various ways. Zha describes how Dai Zi, the Gao brothers, Ding Fang, Qian Zhusheng have conveyed this artistically. For several of these, the Cross of Christ, and our participation in his suffering, form the central theme.

Finally, some artists have produced works based on the concept that God and the human can combine into one. These include the later Qian Zhusheng, Wang Lu, Zhu Jiuyang.

In general, Zha is convinced that “it is hard for those artists who only go to church but do not receive a baptism (sic), to believe in the events of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead, being taken up into heaven . . . of God’s Word becoming flesh. Without any religious experiences it will be more difficult to express these events with their own artistic languages.” 66

This original, creative, theologically and artistically nuanced chapter illustrates what can happen when any domain of human activity, including painting, is viewed through a Christian lens. I found it to be highly

stimulating and satisfying.

Part 3 Church History in China

Chapter 5 Correspondence Between the *Taiping Heavenly Chronicle* and the “Revelation,” by Weichi Zhou

The author demonstrates that Hong Xiuquan’s narrative seeking to legitimize his movement was heavily influenced by the biblical book of the Revelation, as well as by Liang Fa’s 500-page “tract,” *Good Words to Advise the World*. These texts supplied themes and images that helped Hong re-tell and re-interpret the “bizarre” dream he had in 1837. In that dream, Hong saw the Heavenly Father and the Heavenly Wife and Heavenly Sister-in Law, fought against demons, and even whipped Confucius. Most crucially, he believed he had been commissioned, as Younger Brother of Jesus, to return to earth and overthrow all idolatry.

The Revelation and Liang’s work furnished dichotomies that feature prominently in the *Taiping Heavenly Chronicle*, such as God versus Satan and the kingdom of God versus that of Satan. Altogether, Zhou briefly and helpfully describes no fewer than twenty-one major themes that Hong either took or “found” in the Christians sources, and which he adapted for his own purposes.

Especially prominent, of course, is the conflict of the kingdom of God against the kingdom of demons, which justified Hong’s campaign against idolatry and the promotion of the worship of Yahweh as the one true God. The teachings of Confucius “were deceptive to ‘the world being taken by the evil demons for their own glory.’” He believed that his books taught people to worship the ancient sage kings and even himself but not the real God. In the long run, this would make people forget the real God, so people should condemn him. Here Hong linked Confucius with the imperial authority as a suppressive force on the worshippers of God.”⁸⁹ This assault on both popular religion and the official imperial cult of Confucius could not but arouse deadly opposition.

In general, this chapter contains an excellent comparison of Hong’s *Chronicle* and the two major Christian texts he used. There are some problematic passages, however, including his citation of only theologically liberal commentaries on Revelation; seeing a “mild dualism” in the Bible, in which “the image of God became a unity of opposites”⁸⁶; his apparent over-interpretation of Liang Fa’s words to support a theory of human free will; and characterization of most early Western missionaries as advocates of violent revolution. Particularly questionable is his description of the author of the Revelation as possessed by “hatred toward antichrists and persecutors of Christians.”

Despite these flaws, the chapter is nevertheless extremely valuable and will be required reading for anyone seeking to understand the Taiping movement.

Chapter 6 Religion and Marriage: The Reconstruction of the Network of Marriage in a Catholic Community in Eastern Fujian Province

In this carefully researched chapter, Zhang Xianqing shows how religious adherence – in this case, wholesale adoption of Roman Catholicism by a clan – changed the normal marriage patterns between lineages in Fujian.

Distinctive Roman Catholic beliefs and practices, such as the lifelong fidelity to one spouse, prohibition of taking concubines, marriage to Christian believers only, and prohibition of sacrificing to ancestors and folk gods, made marriage between what would have been two quite compatible clans so inconvenient as to be nearly impossible. These realities over-rode other factors, including the traditional pull of the market circle.

Part 4 Biblical and Scriptural Studies

Chapter 7 Differences in Family Values between Greek Mythologies & Hebrew Patriarchal Legend.

Gong Liang compares two “kernel narratives” to illustrate the fundamental differences between Greek and biblical world views: the myth of Oedipus, expressed in Sophocles’ great Theban trilogy, and the Genesis narrative of Abraham’s near-sacrifice of his son Isaac. He also briefly examines the narrative sequence of several other key Greek myths, including the conflict between Uranus and Cronos, a similar one between Cronos and Zeus, and the tragedy of Medea and Jason. He then contrasts each of these with the biblical pa-

triarchal narrative of Isaac's sons Jacob and Esau.

He finds that the Greeks, who relied upon rationality to probe the essence of reality, believed in a fundamental dualism that necessarily engendered ongoing and irreconcilable conflict. Thus, their stories of gods and humans revolve around envy, rivalry, violence, hatred, and revenge. "Might makes right" is the moral standard in both human and divine realms; the weak are pushed aside, and self-indulgence rules the day. The Greeks were left with no model of healthy family relationships and no way to resolve real conflicts.

In the Hebrew Bible, on the other hand, God creates the world, which is distinct from him and completely subordinate to his will, which is good. He is a "moralist," one who instructs his people to do what is just and right. Though we find plenty of conflict in the Genesis histories, we also see fathers blessing their sons and brothers being reconciled to each other through self-reflection and mutual forgiveness.

Liang concludes: "Today, the establishment and maintenance of a harmonious society demand both the essence of Greek myths and the fundamentals of Hebrew patriarchal legends; the former facilitates a better understanding of the universality and complexity of contradiction, while the latter could be drawn on to resolve conflicts so that harmonious interpersonal relations could be nurtured both in domestic life and in society."

Readers will find much to ponder in this profound analysis of two very different cultural traditions. Though the argument is weakened by a reliance upon only liberal biblical scholarship, and therefore an inadequate interpretation of the Genesis passages, overall the author's observation, interpretation, and application of the literature are most persuasive.

Chapter 8 The Understanding of the Bible among the General Public in Mainland China: A Survey on the "Bullet Curtain" of *The Bible*, by Zhenhau Meng

In contrast to previous studies of the reception of the Bible in China by scholars and educated people, this article relays the findings of a scientific survey of responses by "ordinary" Chinese to the TV series, "The Bible," in 2013. The results are most helpful for all who want to understand attitudes toward Christianity in China today.

Briefly: Comments made at the time of viewing show that many Chinese, both Christian and non-Christian, have some knowledge of the Bible. Even though Christianity claims only a relatively few adherents, many more Chinese are interested in the Bible and have read it.

That is the "good" news. The "bad" news is that most Chinese respond negatively to several aspects of the biblical narrative: OT stories of God's judgment upon pagan religion and pagan nations, miracles, and the concept of an exclusive monotheism. Furthermore, most Chinese are still heavily influenced by the perception of Christianity as a Western religion that was brought to China by hostile invaders. Finally, Christians who responded to criticisms of "The Bible" were mostly neither winsome nor persuasive; instead, they evinced impatience, intolerance, and even an attitude of superiority.

From this, we see the great limitation of mass media in bringing people to Christ; the importance of Christian fellowships in drawing in non-believers by love; and the need for churches to teach their people how to answer criticisms of the Bible with reasoned arguments and loving attitudes.

Part 5 Comparative Religious and Cultural Studies

Chapter 9 Chinese New Leftism Between the Leviathan of State and the Wild Horse of Liberalism in the Light of Christianity.

In this long, subtle, and insightful chapter, editor Paulos Huang uses the images of the Leviathan – a fearsome beast – and the wild horse to represent the powerful state and traditional political and economic liberalism, especially as they are espoused by leading intellectuals in China today. Liberalism, which promotes personal and economic freedom, allows people and economies to flourish, but encourages unbridled greed and selfishness, and leads to concentrations of power in the hands of the rich. A powerful state is needed to reign in the "wild horse" of selfish individuals and the voracious activity of the free market, but it usually does so by imposing an order that stifles individual creativity and market activity as well.

Both can be critiqued by Christianity, which recognizes the limits of any planned economy, because of

the finitude and limitations of people as mere creatures, and the tendency of power to corrupt, on the one hand, and the evils of selfishness and unrestrained freedom, on the other. Only a liberalism that returns to its Christian roots will have the persuasive power to refute the legitimate criticisms of New Leftists and challenge their idealizing of the all-powerful state.

Christianity both rejects the romantic idolatry of human reason and the ability of the state to bring heaven on earth, and calls for compassionate use of wealth.

The entire article deserves very careful study; I have noted only a few selected highlights of it.

Chapter 10

Person and Shen: An Ontological Encounter of “Nestorian” Christianity with Confucianism in Tang China, by ZhuDonghua.

The author begins by noting that Chinese notions of “person” do not include the idea of a “solitary individual that can be radically separate from anyone else,” and that the Western idea of “person” that has been brought by Christianity does not adequately connect with traditional Chinese concepts of human beings.

He finds that the translation of “person” (*prosopa*) as *shen* by the Syrian Christians of the Tang dynasty makes a very powerful connection with Chinese thought. Tracing this translation by the “Nestorian” theologian Jing Jing (Adam) back to the work of Theodore of Mopsuestia and the idea that the Son (Word) of God did not just take upon a human body, but became a human, he shows how this dissolves the mind-body dualism of Western Christianity. This relates more closely to traditional Chinese concepts of the “person” as *shen*, a mind-body unity that is not completely isolated from others or from the world.

Though I have some questions about the characterization of the Western concept of person as a mind-body dualism, I found this chapter to be one of the best in the book, and quite promising for further reflection upon the most biblical ways of expressing Christian truth in Chinese idioms.

Part 6 A Review and Academic Report

Chapter 11 Approaching Civil Society under Construction: Protestant Churches in China in 2010, Responsibility and Introspection, by Haibo Huang

Space allows only a summary of this long chapter. The author begins by citing two surveys published in 2010 that report the total number of Christians in China as, respectively 23 million and 33 million, or 1.8% and 2.3%. Even if we accept a higher number, such as 60 million, the result is the same: “Christianity in China still occupies a relatively marginal position and has not entered ‘mainstream society in China,’ as some overly optimistic people once thought.” 217

With this assumption. Huang believes that, on the one hand, the rights of Christians need to be further protected by law, and on the other, Christians should seek to minimize possible negative effects on social harmony and on the perception of others about them by engaging in “social work and social care,” rather than pushing for political change.

Writing at a time when “civil society” had been affirmed by the Fourth Plenary Session of the Sixteenth Central Committee of the China Communist Party, Huang urges Christian organizations to enter into civil society through a range of actions that will contribute to social harmony and the well-being of society at large. He then gives a detailed survey of ten ways in which Christians associated with the China Christian Council/Three-Self Patriotic Movement (the so-called “liang hui”) have made significant contributions to civil society:

1. Professional training for social service work.
2. AIDS prevention and patient care.
3. Drug rehabilitation.
4. Medical care.
5. Service to the elderly.
6. Promotion of environmental care.
7. “Volunteer services in significant events” like the Shanghai World Expo.
8. Disaster relief.
9. Care for vulnerable groups like the disabled, migrant workers, the deaf, etc.
10. Sharing of knowledge on modern civilization, such as marriage and family living.

Next, Huang turns to internal matters, especially theological thought and church organization. Theological maturity among Christians has been deepened by strenuous efforts to raise the level of knowledge and understanding among leaders especially, as well as by dialogue with unregistered churches. The “theological

reconstruction” movement led by Bishop DingGuangxun is highly praised. Church buildings, some of them very large, have been constructed, and believers have been taught to love the country and obey its laws, as well as to practice “standardized management.”

Churches in China must engage in dialogue with Christians around the world. Huang strongly criticizes the actions of the organizing committee of the Lausanne Movement in its preparations for the 2010 meeting in Cape Town, charging them with “ignorance and prejudice” in overly favoring unregistered churches.

Finally, the chapter surveys “progress” made by the CCC/TSPM since its founding in the early 1950s. While generously acknowledging the sacrifices and contributions of missionaries, the new movement brought true indigenization to Christianity for the first time. The CCC/TSPM also forms a bulwark against the heresies and theological faults of unregistered churches, which are mostly negatively characterized here.

Still, even CCC/TSPM churches need reform and revival in order to participate properly and helpfully in civil society, and Huang frankly faces these problems.

Evaluation

This first edition of the *Yearbook of Chinese Theology* belongs in every library. Its cost will prohibit wide private ownership, but all researchers of Christianity in China should have access to it because its various chapters together provide indispensable insight into the current situation and theological reflection of Chinese Christians and others.

A few chapters (i. e. , 4, 6, 10) should have been more carefully edited for grammar, vocabulary, and style by those whose native language is English and who were brought up in the West. Over the years, I have found that even English majors who have graduated from the most prestigious schools in China almost never possess the requisite “feel” for correct English prose that this task demands, and that those educated in Hong Kong and Singapore consistently make mistakes, especially in the handling of verb tenses.

The presence of the first two chapters in this volume, especially in a section purportedly about “systematic theology,” seriously diminishes the value of the book. In fact, one would be tempted to call them completely irrelevant, except that their inclusion demonstrates what they claim, namely, that the political situation in China dictates themes and content of writing about Christianity, as all must be subservient to the policies of the party-state.

As in the Chinese academy generally, so also in this volume the almost complete neglect of evangelical, and especially American evangelical, theology and biblical studies is glaringly obvious. Reliance upon now-outdated and discredited critical opinions deprives Chinese scholars of the best tools for understanding Christianity.

Nevertheless, the *Yearbook* testifies to the depth and breadth of serious reflection upon Christianity underway now among Chinese scholars. The editor and his colleagues deserve high praise for their courage, hard work, and skill in offering a sampling of this thought to the English-reading world.

中文题目：

《博睿中国神学年鉴 2015》简评

戴德理

世华中心 (Global China Center), Charlottesville, Virginia, USA

322 Lori Circle, Bastrop, TX 78602, USA, 电邮: wrightdoyle@gmail.com

Yearbook of Chinese Theology 2015. Palos Huang, editor. Leiden: Brill, 2015. 250 pages include index.